

□ **Washington, D.C.** – Members of Oregon's House congressional delegation, Reps. Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield), Greg Walden (R-Hood River), Kurt Schrader (D-Canby), Earl Blumenauer (D-Portland) and David Wu (D-Hillsdale) were joined by 49 of their colleagues today in sending a bipartisan letter to Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan and Ranking Member Chris Van Hollen urging the Budget Committee to accommodate a reauthorization of county payments in the FY 2012 House Budget Resolution. Funding county payments in FY 2012 would ensure rural counties have the resources to provide essential services like emergency services, health care, and schools while Congress works to find long-term funding solutions for timber dependent communities.

"County timber payments represent an important lifeline for rural forested communities in Oregon," Walden said. "While many challenges lie ahead in identifying a solution that can be signed into law, building a bipartisan coalition in the House of Representatives is an important step. We appreciate the relevant House committees working with us as we identify ways to sustainably fund our rural forested counties without adding to the federal deficit. I look forward to continuing the important work with the counties and my colleagues in the days ahead. Of course, both the counties and the communities would be better off if we could improve federal policies to manage our forests and put Oregonians back to work in the woods."

"Without a meaningful, long-term solution for our timber dependent communities, counties in Southwest Oregon will again be forced to start handing out pink slips in a bad economy – we will lose sheriff patrols, jail beds, teachers and other vital public services. Rural communities can't afford higher unemployment or further erosion of essential services. We need language in the House Budget Resolution in order to keep communities afloat and avoid these disastrous cuts while we continue to work towards a long-term solution that will sustain these counties long into the future," DeFazio said.

"This program keeps schools open, roads maintained, vital services operating and upholds a century-long commitment that Congress made to rural America," said Schrader. "As a delegation we continue the education campaign to make sure our colleagues understand how critical this funding is to not only rural Oregon, but all rural America. It's inclusion in the President's budget was an important victory, but the work goes on to make sure our rural communities can keep their doors open."

"I'm glad the Oregon delegation is coming together to push for this funding, which is so vital to communities all across our state. While we know this will be an uphill struggle in the current

budget year, my colleagues and I will do all that we can to sustain the federal partnership for rural communities," Blumenauer said.

"It's critical that the federal government continue to honor its 100-year commitment to our rural communities," said Congressman David Wu. "I look forward to working with my colleagues on a multi-year reauthorization in order to ensure continued access to vital services throughout the state."

The President's budget included \$328 million to fund the first of a multi-year extension of the program. The bipartisan House coalition is working to get the program included in the House Budget Resolution scheduled to be released in early April.

The full text of the letter is below:

March 22, 2011

The Honorable Paul D. Ryan

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen

Chairman

Ranking Member

House Committee on the Budget

House Committee on the Budget

207 Cannon House Office Building

B71 Cannon House Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20515

Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Ryan and Ranking Member Van Hollen:

We request your assistance as we work with our rural counties to identify solutions to extend and fund the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 ("SRS," P.L. 94-565) in FY 2012 and beyond. Furthermore, we request that the House Budget Committee accommodate this reauthorization in its FY 2012 House Budget Resolution. This is an important issue impacting jobs and the funding of schools and emergency services in our rural counties.

We understand well the current budgetary climate and the need to reduce deficit spending, and support offsetting a long-term reauthorization of SRS. Furthermore, we appreciate your willingness to work with us and the authorizing committees in the coming months to help identify legitimate offsets that sustainably fund this important rural priority without adding to the growing federal deficit.

With the establishment of the National Forest System between 1891 and 1911 by Congressional action and Presidential Proclamation, hundreds of millions of forestland acres throughout the United States were set aside in perpetuity and removed from further settlement. These new forest reserves, which were to be managed by the U.S. Forest Service, in many cases consumed between 65 to 90 percent of the land in rural western, southeastern and southern counties. Setting aside large blocks of public lands and the ongoing acquisition of large tracks of private forestlands since have diminished the potential tax base and ability for the counties to generate economic activity.

Congress in 1908 and subsequently in 1913 acknowledged the enormous collective impact these actions had on counties and their ability to fund essential services, including the education of rural school children, the maintenance of rural roads and infrastructure, and the provision of emergency services. President Theodore Roosevelt signed into law the Twenty-five Percent Fund Act of 1908 (16 USC. 500) and in 1913 amendments were made to the Weeks Act, which created a revenue sharing mechanism specifying that 25 percent of all revenues generated from the multiple-use management of our national forests would be shared with the counties for "the benefit of the public schools and public roads in the county or counties in which such national forests are situated". Through this action, Congress committed to a long-term partnership referred to by many as a "compact" and recognized as a fundamental obligation of the federal government in exchange for establishing the National Forest System.

The intent of Congress that our national forests be managed in a sustained multiple-use manner

to provide revenues for local counties and the federal treasury in perpetuity worked well from 1908 until about 1986. From 1986 to the present, due to reduced active management of our federal forests and increased protections for species on federal lands, these revenues dropped precipitously (as much as 99 percent in some counties and on average 70 percent nationwide).

Congress responded by passing the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act in 2000. In many rural counties once dependent on timber revenue, these payments are the lifeblood of local schools and community essential services. The legislation also created highly successful "Resource Advisory Committees," which have brought polarized groups together to conduct hundreds of restoration projects on national forests across the country without being litigated or appealed.

In 2007, Congress reauthorized this important law and extended SRS payments for one year to help rural counties and schools avert a major financial crisis. In October 2008, Congress reauthorized the SRS legislation for four years as part of H.R. 1424, the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008. The reauthorization provided rural counties with four years of payments on a declining scale for fiscal years 2008-2011.

While the four-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act was a rare legislative accomplishment that helped preserve and create jobs across America, rural counties are again facing a budgetary cliff after they receive the final SRS payment in FY 2011. In response to this ongoing issue, we need a meaningful and long-term solution that will help ensure rural communities have the resources they need to provide basic county services.

Congress made a promise to these counties more than 100 years ago and we intend to do all that we can to make sure Congress honors its commitment. Accommodating the reauthorization of the SRS, while showing that it will be offset by the relevant authorizing committees in the FY 2012 House Budget Resolution, will go a long way in demonstrating Congress's commitment and responsibility to the economic security and sustainability of our rural counties.

Thank you for your attention and consideration to this important issue. We look forward to working with you and the appropriate authorizing committees to develop a plan for reauthorizing the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act.

Sincerely,

Greg Walden

Peter DeFazio

Kurt Schrader

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer

David Wu

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

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